

CONSUMER INFORMATION FROM USDA

Food Safety and Inspection Service, Food Safety & Consumer
Education Office

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Microwave Food Safety

There are traits unique to microwave cooking that affect how evenly and safely food is cooked. "Cold spots" can occur because of the irregular way the microwaves enter the oven and are absorbed by the food.

If food doesn't cook evenly, bacteria may survive and cause foodborne illness. Simple techniques ensure that meat and poultry microwave safely.

Defrosting Food

- **Remove food from store wrap prior to microwave defrosting.** Foam trays and plastic wraps are not heat stable at high temperatures. Melting or warping from hot food may cause chemicals to migrate into food.

- **Cook meat and poultry immediately after micro thawing.**

Some areas of frozen food may begin to cook during the defrosting time. Holding partially cooked food is not recommended because any bacteria present wouldn't have been destroyed.

- **Remember to take food out of the microwave!** Don't forget about a food item that's been thawing in the micro. Food should not be left out of refrigeration more than two hours.

Utensil Safety Test

If you're not sure if pottery or dinnerware is microwave safe, place the empty utensil in the microwave alongside 1 cup water in a glass measure. Microwave on high 1 minute. If the dish remains cool, it's safe to microwave. If the dish gets warm or hot to the touch, don't use.

Utensils Safe to Use

- **Safe utensils** for microwave cooking include glass and glass ceramic cookware, and those labeled for microwave use.
- **Don't use cold storage containers.** Margarine tubs, whipped topping bowls, cheese containers, and others can warp or melt from hot food, possibly causing chemical migration.
- **Wraps and bags.** Wax paper, oven cooking bags, parchment paper and white microwave paper towels should be safe to use. Avoid letting plastic wraps and thin plastic storage bags touch foods during microwaving. Never use brown grocery bags or newspapers in the microwave.

Reheating Foods

- **Heat leftovers and precooked food to at least 165° F.** Food should be steaming and hot to the touch.
- Cover foods to hold in moisture and provide safe, even heating.
- Due to the possibility of uneven heating, microwaving baby food and formula is not recommended. If microwaved, stir food, shake bottles and test for lukewarm temperature.

Call Toll-free For More Information:

USDA Meat and Poultry
Hotline

1 (800) 535-4555

Washington DC (202) 720-3333

Microwave Cooking

- **Debone large pieces of meat.** Bone can shield the meat around it from thorough cooking.
- **Arrange food items uniformly in a covered dish** and add a little liquid. Under a cover, such as a lid or vented plastic wrap, steam helps destroy bacteria and ensure uniform heating. Oven cooking bags also promote safe, even cooking.
- **Cook large pieces of meat on medium power (50%) for longer times.** This allows heat to conduct deeper into meat without overcooking outer areas.
- **Stir or rotate food once or twice during microwaving,** and turn large food items upside down so foods cook more evenly and safely.
- **Do not microwave whole, stuffed poultry.** Cooking of meat is so rapid, the stuffing inside might not reach a sufficient temperature to be safe.
- **Never partially cook food.** When microwaving food partly done to finish cooking on the grill or conventional oven, transfer the microwaved food to another heat source immediately.
- **Use a meat thermometer or the oven's temperature probe** to verify the food has reached a safe temperature. Ovens vary in power and efficiency. Check in several places to be sure red meat is 160° F; poultry, 180° F. Check for visual signs of doneness. Juices should run clear and meat should not be pink. Observe standing times given so cooking is completed.